

Morris Sticks: sourcing and prepping tips

If you've just inherited the responsibility for obtaining and preparing your side's Morris sticks and you are not sure how to go about it, here's some tips from a couple of border morris people who are woodland owners with experience of green woodworking...



Sourcing sticks

The Coppice Federation is a great place to find a supplier. Spring coppicing of fast growing trees such as hazel, birch, holly and rowan produces poles of various sizes from bean poles and weavers to tree stakes and fence posts and the ideal size for Morris sticks is those in-between poles. Coppicers are keen to develop a sustainable outlet for all of the coppiced material so will be happy to help you with a regular

supply. If you get in touch with the regional rep they will have access to a number of coppicers in your area ensuring a steady supply.

The Ideal wood for Morris sticks is hazel as when coppiced properly it grows straight; it is light and strong enough for repeated hard strikes yet flexible enough to prevent excessive shock to the wrist and arm. Rowan and birch are also fine for Morris sticks. Holly is used by some as it grows very fast and is very durable and attractive for its smooth pale appearance when stripped. Just be aware that it is more dense and inflexible so can feel like an iron bar when sticking.

If possible, give your supplier a sample of your sticks so that they can work out the final thickness you are looking for. Let them know if you want the sticks pre-cut or full length so that you can cut your own to size.

Prepping the Sticks: seasoning

Some sides will happily use green (unseasoned) wood but seasoned sticks will last longer and be less likely to split and fray. Seasoning the wood involves slow drying with the sticks stored in a way that keeps them straight.

Stack the sticks in an open airy location, ideally with a breeze, covered against the rain and raised off the ground. Seasoning fully will probably take between three and twelve months. The denser the wood, e.g. holly, the longer the time to season. There may be some shrinkage in the diameter of the stick but not the length so you can cut the sticks to the desired length before seasoning.

The following images show a couple of ways of stacking the sticks on a pallet if you don't have a wood store. If you can't store them outside then a cool shed or garage will do as long as air can circulate. The sticks shown haven't been cut to final size yet but we will be doing that before they are put to season in our wood store.



To strip or not to strip..

Removing the bark can speed up the drying process but it is mainly a style issue for some sides. Generally sticks from a healthy coppiced tree can be left unstripped for the useful life of the stick. If the sticks need to be stripped of bark, this will be easier when the wood is 'green'. The ideal tool for this is a two-handed draw knife. You might want to ask your contact if they can prep and dry the sticks for you. Many coppice workers are also members of the green woodworkers (bodging) community and will be happy to help you.

Useful Contacts

Bodging and Coppice Management are ancient heritage crafts that support biodiversity. To find out more check out these web links:

Bodgers (Green Woodworking) The Association of Pole-Lathe Turners and Green Woodworkers <https://www.bodgers.org.uk>

To find out about products of coppicing you can contact their products team email Federation of Coppice Workers found here - Products <https://ncfed.org.uk/public/products/>

To establish a connection with your nearest Coppice group check out the regional representative details <https://ncfed.org.uk/the-ncfed/members/>

Happy Sticking!

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